**READING #3 DISCUSSION GUIDE**

**Consider the relationship between Eliezer and his father.**

* Give examples of the ways Eliezer’s relationship with his father is changing. What is prompting those changes?
* What does Eliezer mean when he refers to his father as “his weak point”? Why has he come to view love as a weakness?
* How do the changes in his relationship with his father affect the way Eliezer sees himself as an individual? The way he views his father?

**Consider how the process of dehumanization affects Eliezer and his fellow prisoners.**

* How do words like *soup* and *bread* take on a new meaning for Eliezer? Why does he describe himself as a “starved stomach”? What did it mean to see bread and soup as one’s “whole life”?
* Eliezer describes two hangings in this section. He tells the reader that he witnessed many others. Yet he chose to write only about these two. Why are these two hangings so important to him? How do they differ from the others?
* Why do you think Eliezer and the other prisoners respond so emotionally to the hanging of the child?
* Why do you think the Germans chose to hang a few prisoners in public at a time when they are murdering thousands each day in the crematoriums?
* When the young boy is hanged, a prisoner asks, “For God’s sake, where is God?” Eliezer hears a voice answer, “Where He is? This is where - - hanging here on this gallows…” What does this statement mean? Is it a statement of despair? Anger? Or hope?

**Discuss the meaning of the word *resistance* at Auschwitz.**

* What does the word *resistance* mean to you? Some insist that “armed resistance” is the only form of legitimate resistance. Others stress the idea that resistance requires organization. Still others argue that resistance is more about the will to live and the power of hope than it is about either weapons or organization. Which view is closest to your own?
* Use your ideas about the definitions of resistance to decide whether each of the following is an act of resistance:
  + Eliezer’s refusal to let the dentist remove his gold crown
  + Eliezer’s decision to give up the crown to protect his father
  + The French girl’s decision to speak in German to Eliezer after he is beaten
  + The prisoner’s choosing to di for soup
  + The prisoners who attempted to stockpile weapons, for which they were later hanged
* In each act of resistance that you identified, who or what are the prisoners resisting?

**View the behavior of other inmates from Wiesel’s perspective.**

Elie Wiesel said the following of inmates who tried “to show the killers they could be just like them”:

No one has the right to judge them, especially not those who did not experience Auschwitz or Buchenwald. The sages of our Tradition state point-blank: “Do not judge your fellow man until you stand in his place.” In other words, in the same situation, would I have acted as he did? Sometimes doubt grips me. Suppose I had spent not eleven months but eleven years in a concentration camp. Am I sure I would have kept my hands clean? No, I am not, and no one can be.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* How does Wiesel try to help us understand why it is so difficult to judge those who “tried to play the executioner’s game”?
* Wiesel writes that he prefers to remember “the kindness and compassion” of his fellow prisoners rather than those who were cruel or violent. How does he describe both groups in this reading? Why does he view both as a victim?

1. Elie Wiesel, *All Rivers Run to the Sea: Memoirs* (Knopf, 1995), 86-87. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)